

**SUPERVISOR'S
GUIDE
TO PREPARING
OFFICER
PROGRAM
APPLICATION
ENDORSEMENTS**

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Cape May, NJ**

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v. 2

AFTERWORD

The CO's endorsement is a major factor in the applicant's success in persuading the selection board he/she has the disposition to make the change from "E" to "O". I hope this handbook makes drafting that endorsement a bit easier.

However, because changes to the *Recruiting Manual* and *Personnel Manual* and to the GoCoastGuard.com web site are made without notice and because ESOs can't routinely review every page of every web site and every publication they consult looking for changes, some information in this guide may become outdated over time. Official publications and web sites provide the definitive word in cases where there is a difference between them and what I've written in these pages.

A NOTE ON APPLICANT NARRATIVE MEMOS

Don't be put off when you see that the applicant's narrative memo is double spaced. This is a new requirement from CGRC and is specified on the "Officer Programs Check-off Sheet" all applicants must use. Likewise, applicants' résumés are required to be double-spaced. (See items 2 and 4 on page 3 of the Check-off Sheet.)

This double-spacing requirement is new as of the Fall of 2007 and, apparently, stems from the fact that many applicants were padding their narrative memos and résumés. Allowing them less space in which to extol their virtues improves the chances that what they write will be useful to selection boards as they make their decisions.

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FOREWORD

This doesn't mean commands should ignore everything to do with the interview process. A blank copy of the "Officer Programs Applicant Interview Form" (CG-5527) provides a concise view of the factors selection boards consider when selecting applicants. Those factors are:

- performance of duties,
- communication skills,
- leadership skills, and
- personal and professional qualities.

The information in this handbook is taken from official sources including the *Personnel Manual* (COMDTINST M1000.6 (series)), the *Recruiting Manual* (COMDTINST M1100.2 (series)), the directive which establishes CSPI (COMDTINST 1131.16B), the directive which establishes PEP (COMDTINST 1131.21A), and the *Correspondence Manual* (COMDTINST M5216.4 (series)) as well as the Coast Guard Recruiting Command's web site, various messages, quasi-official information I've acquired from the Internet, and e-mail exchanges and telephone conversations with various individuals who had the information I needed.

This unofficial handbook is intended to help supervisors of Coast Guard personnel who are submitting applications for the various officer accession programs. ESOs may also find it of use. However, I must insert a caution and a disclaimer.

The caution is that the *Recruiting Manual* and *Personnel Manual* are not always consistent.

THE INTERVIEW REPORT

Applicants are not required to provide their commands with a copy of the report prepared by the three-officer board which interviews them as part of the application process. This is both a practical and philosophical matter.

Practically speaking, one of the items the interview board needs to see is the command's endorsement, so having the interview report available for those who write the command endorsement is impossible.

Philosophically, basing a command endorsement on the views of the interview board reduce the amount of independent evidence the selection board will eventually have before it when making its decisions as to who to reject and who to accept for the Coast Guard's officer accession programs. By basing its endorsement on first-hand knowledge of the applicant, commands provide selection boards with more useful information.

As to the disclaimer, both of these publications often refer to the ESO's role in this process and refer applicants to the ESO for further information about it. The assumption underlying these referrals is that ESOs have received training on the process, application procedures, what information is and is not to be included on the various forms, and have a store of information unavailable to applicants.

This assumption has no basis in fact.

ESO's have no more information than applicants or their supervisors on the officer program application process.

The information contained in this guidebook (and in the companion handbook for applicants) which is not taken directly from the sources cited above is what I've deduced from those sources and general knowledge of Coast Guard procedures and policies. My interpretations may not be completely accurate, but in the absence of anything else, I believe they're the best available.

If applicants' supervisors – or applicants themselves – learn anything from CGRC that contradicts what's written in these pages, I hope they'll bring it to my attention so I may make the appropriate corrections.

Andrew Webb
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select people with a specific reason from seeing much of what's in the application folder unless the applicant wishes to provide it.

OVERVIEW

I also tell applicants they should probably provide a list of their strengths, similar to what they provide their supervisors at marks time.

The individuals who draft and review the command's endorsement have no reason to see the many documents the completed application will contain. And, as a practical matter, there's little in the application that will help the command draft the endorsement.

For example, knowing the applicant's blood pressure, what grades he/she received in college, what others who wrote letters of recommendation said, or whether the applicant has forgotten to include any of the many forms only a YN at OCS will ever want to see will provide little to nothing of value to those who draft and review the endorsement. Indeed, my experience is that providing this information usually just clouds the task at hand: evaluating the applicant's potential value to the Coast Guard as a commissioned officer.

Further, the Privacy Act and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) prohibit all but

Because the various requirements for preparing either an officer program application or the applicant's command's endorsement are laid set out in numerous publications, messages, and on the Internet, it is not easy to piece together all those requirements. This has made the application process more difficult than it need be, for both the applicant and his/her chain of command.

The purpose of this handbook is to take the guesswork out of the process for those in the applicant's chain of command so they can spend time on the actual endorsement rather than on determining what the endorsement should consist of.

This handbook deals only with endorsements for officer programs which accept enlisted applicants. At the moment, these are:

- OCS (Officer Candidate School)
- DCE (Direct Commission Engineer program)

WHAT THE APPLICANT MUST PROVIDE

Applicants are not required to provide anything besides their narrative memo to those who draft the endorsement. The assumption underlying an endorsement is that the person drafting it knows the applicant well. If this is not the case, an interview may be in order. But the verbiage in the endorsement should be based on personal knowledge of the applicant rather than documents.

That said, I advise applicants to provide their chains of command with the items their commands must comment on in their endorsements. These include:

- evidence of their ability and willingness to meet their financial obligations,
- the character standards set out in the *Recruiting Manual*,
- the section of the *Personnel Manual* which describes how average marks are calculated and photocopies of documents that include the information needed to calculate them, as well as those which include the applicant's most recent marks for Performance, Leadership, Military, and Professional Qualities Factor.

- AVCAD (Aviation Candidate program)
- PPEP (Pre-commissioning Program for Enlisted Personnel)

OCS

OCS is a 17-week training program to which enlisted Coast Guard personnel who have completed some college may apply. College graduates may apply only for Reserve commissions; non-college graduates may apply only for temporary Regular commissions.

DCE

The DCE program is not widely known, but it allows enlisted personnel with at least an associate's degrees in specific engineering fields to obtain temporary commissions. Upon promotion to LT, they are eligible to request permission to complete their bachelor's degrees via full-time studies at the Coast Guard's expense.

AVCAD

The Coast Guard's AVCAD program (what used to be called the Aviation Cadet program) is a means for enlisted servicemembers to attend OCS and then go immediately to flight school.

PPFP

PPFP is specifically for Regular and Reserve enlisted Coast Guard personnel. Participants in this program attend college on a full-time basis for up to two calendar to complete a bachelor's degree then attend OCS and receive temporary Coast Guard commissions. While participating in the program, participants continue to receive all the compensation and benefits associated with their rate.

PPFP participants must complete their degrees through resident (as opposed to distance learning) programs and the school they attend must be relatively close, geographically, to the applicant's residence at the time he/she applies for the program.

Purpose of the Endorsement

Article 4.B.1.b.1. of the *Recruiting Manual* lays out the purpose of the CO's endorsement:

... Since selection panels do not have access to personnel records and are not aware of NJP, adverse administrative remarks, or other indicators of non-adherence to the Coast Guard's core values, CGRC relies on the CO's endorsement. The CO's endorsement certifies that the command conducted a review of the member's record and that the applicant meets character standards in this article. If the CO rescinds his or her endorsement at any time be-

Nowhere do any of the references say specifically which entity is responsible for actually checking DirectAccess, the applicant's PDR, and other documentation so the command can certify the applicant meets the standards. It stands to reason, however, that since the Servicing Personnel Office (SPO), PersRU, etc. has access to all such documentation it should perform this task on the CO's/OIC's behalf.

Based on that reasoning, I advise applicants to provide the SPO, PersRU, etc. with a check list of the program's qualifications. The CGRC "Officer Programs Check-off Sheet" (<http://gocoastguard.com/find-your-fit/officer-opportunities/programs/program-forms-and-deadlines>) is as good a guide as any for this purpose. However since not every item on the check list applies to every officer program, I also recommend applicants highlight the items that apply to the program they're applying for and if it's not printed on the form, write in citations to the relevant manuals where that will help the YNs who actually conduct the review.

4.B.1.a. of the *Recruiting Manual*.

6. The applicant's average marks during his/her current enlistment according to Article 12.B.48 of the *Personnel Manual*, and the applicant's most recent marks for Performance, Leadership, Military, and Professional Qualities Factor.

There is nothing in any reference I've been able to locate which specifies how these items are to be covered. However, bullet format seems to me the most logical approach.

Also, even though it is not specifically required, it also seems logical to me that the last paragraph of the endorsement should read something like this:

I certify that Petty Officer Washington meets all qualifications for the _____ program as set forth in the *Personnel Manual*, the *Recruiting Manual*, and all other relevant directives and ALCOASTs.

That will give CGRC's staff (which reviews applications for completeness) a quick way to tell if the applicant qualifies. Alternatively, it could cite references instead of the names of the publications in the body like this:

I certify that Petty Officer Washington meets all qualifications for the _____ program as set forth in refs (____) through (____).

fore appointment, the applicant will be disqualified for that selection cycle.

WHO CAN WRITE AN ENDORSEMENT?

Article 4.B.1.b.1. of the *Recruiting Manual* requires this endorsement to come from a CO – a commissioned officer. Here's what it says:

All packages require a commanding officer's (CO) endorsement. Only one recommendation from a member's CO shall be included in his or her application package. The CO must be a commissioned officer; an endorsement by an officer-in-charge is not sufficient. ...

Unfortunately, the *Recruiting Manual* doesn't say who's supposed to write the endorsement for an applicant who's attached to a unit with an OIC and CGRC has provided no other guidance I've been able to locate.

I've advised applicants in such situations to contact CGRC as soon as they make the decision to apply for an officer program to find out who's supposed to write the endorsement.

lay out what qualities the CO/OIC thinks an officer should possess and then state how the applicant has or lacks those qualities. The "Officer Evaluation Report (OER)" for W-2s through O-2s also provides a good deal of material to draw on when stating the command's views on whether the applicant possesses the qualities a junior officer should possess, taking into account the fact that he/she has not yet received any officer-specific training.

Article 4.B.1.b. of the *Recruiting Manual* requires the endorsement to include several specific things.

1. An evaluation of the applicant's potential value to the Coast Guard as a commissioned officer.
2. An evaluation of the applicant compared with other personnel the CO/OIC has known who have completed the program the applicant is applying to.
3. Any outstanding professional or other qualifications the applicant may possess.

4. A statement of knowledge about the applicant's ability and willingness to meet his/her financial obligations.

5. A statement certifying that the command conducted a review of the applicant's record to determine if he/she meets the character standards described in Article

ENDORSEMENT CONTENTS

Article 1.B.5.F.2.c of the *Personnel Manual* provides some guidance as to what the endorsement should contain. Essentially, it should generally avoid comments on the applicant's abilities in his/her rate. The endorsement is not meant to be a rehash of the comments section of the applicant's most recent marks. With one exception, the interview and selection boards want to know if the applicant is officer material, not how well he/she has done as a petty officer. That exception is that the board does want to know if the applicant has any outstanding professional qualifications. Generally, then, the only rate-related information that should be included is that which relates to officer duties and qualities, and the applicant's potential as an officer.

The endorsement is meant to be a concise statement of what the command thinks of the applicant and whether the CO/OIC thinks the applicant will be a good officer.

One way to approach drafting an endorsement, then, is to

ENDORSEMENT FORMAT

The fact that commands are required to write endorsementments for applicants implies there is something to endorse. The specific item the command is endorsing is the applicant's narrative memo. This memo is required by the *Personnel Manual* – "A brief narrative explaining the applicant's reasons for applying ... and [explaining the applicant's] goals as a Coast Guard officer, if selected."

The fact that the application requires an endorsement implies it must have a *Thru* line. The *Correspondence Manual* has specific rules for the format of endorsements to memos with *Thru* lines.

- The endorsement may *not* be a stand-alone memo from your CO/OIC to the Coast Guard Recruiting Command (CGRC).

- This means that the CO's/OIC's signature or initials on the *Thru* line, with no comments, will be considered insufficient. Although a CO/OIC has a right to do this and even though approval of the memo is implied by such an endorsement, the absence of comments or a complete

This means that the CO's/OIC's signature or initials on the *Thru* line, with no comments, will be considered insufficient. Although a CO/OIC has a right to do this and even though approval of the memo is implied by such an endorsement, the absence of comments or a complete endorsement will indicate to the members of the boards who read it that the command doesn't think enough of the applicant to write anything good about him/her. That is, a signature endorsement will likely be taken as a slap in the applicant's face and as a mark against him/her.